

## Rethink way road patrols are financed

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guest essayists

You get what you pay for: That's often the line you hear from someone trying to part you from your money. Sometimes, it's even true.

But it's not true for taxpayers in Rochester, Gates, Greece, Irondequoit, Brighton, East Rochester, Ogden and Webster. They collectively pay more than \$16 million for something they aren't getting: the Monroe County sheriff's road patrol.

Towns (and the several villages) that maintain their own police departments still contribute, through residential property taxes, millions for a police force that does not serve them, although deputies do patrol expressways that pass through some of these communities. Of course, taxpayers in those towns pay for their local police as well.

Here are a few of the numbers, based on the current budgets and assessed value of each town and Monroe County as a whole:

\*In Irondequoit, 28 percent, or \$8.05 million, of the town's \$28.9 million 2005 budget will be devoted to local law enforcement. Irondequoit's contribution to sheriff's road patrol is about \$2.1 million.

\*Rochester spends more than \$90 million for its Police Department, or nearly one-quarter of its annual spending. City residents pay another \$4.5 million for the sheriff's road patrol.

\*Gates earmarks nearly \$2.9 million of its \$11.8 million annual budget for police, and its residents must pay another \$1.13 million for the road patrol.

\*Brighton allocates more than \$5.3 million yearly for its police force, or 30 percent of its total 2005 net appropriations. Brighton taxpayers pay more than \$2 million for the road patrol.

This situation constitutes a significant inequity. So we have submitted legislation asking that Monroe County convene a commission to recommend avenues for property tax relief in the affected towns.

The options on the table include direct rebates to taxpayers and/or rebates to governments with the stipulation that at least some portion of the funds be directed toward support of local police agencies.

Our goal is to offer possible tax relief while allowing greater local control of hard-earned tax dollars. Imagine, for instance, if some portion of Rochester's sheriff's road patrol share could be spent instead on patrols in the northwest, where violent crime has risen sharply.

Make no mistake: we admire the great work done by our Sheriff's Office, and certain of its services are shared with

other municipalities. But the problem is that we are charged as if we get the benefit of all sheriff's department services, and we don't.

We believe there are many good reasons for towns and villages to maintain their own law enforcement agencies, in that they represent the essence of community policing. And municipalities should not be penalized for doing so by what amounts to double taxation.

Yes, legislators on both sides of the aisle whose districts do not include local police departments may be concerned about this proposal. Perhaps you are as well. We look forward to hearing their arguments - and yours - and finding the solution that best serves the public interest. That is what you pay for.

Eckel, a Democrat, is running for re-election to the Monroe County Legislature, 26th District; O'Brien, a Democrat, is running for re-election in the legislature's 17th District.

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